

Touring as a Peircean habit

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Many tourism theoreticians have posited touring as an exercise in semiotics (*inter alia* Culler, 1981; Echtner, 1999; Frow, 1991; MacCannell, 1976; Metro-Roland 2009; 2011; Waterton & Watson, 2014) and the tourism site as sign (Knudsen & Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Lau, 2011). Questions remain, however, concerning the ability of Peircean semiotics (and semiotics more generally) to engage with performance and emotion, both of which are now recognized as fundamental qualities of touring (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen & Urry, 2004; Edensor, 2000; Rickly-Boyd, Knudsen, Braverman & Metro-Roland, 2014; Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010; Waterton & Watson, 2014). In this research note we wish to argue that the Peircean notion of habit inherently relates to the performative and that it, further, is sufficiently general to incorporate emotionality.

Semiotics, or sign theory, is one way to explain the means by which we make sense of the world. While much of the semiotic theory employed today is based in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), the semiotics of American Charles Peirce is preferred here (Metro-Roland, 2009, 2011). Rather than use a bifurcated sign as did Saussure, Peirce (1998) suggested a tripartite sign comprised of object, representamen and interpretant. This is useful, firstly, because Peirce engages the actual object, while Saussure is concerned rather with the relationship between the signifier (an acoustic image) and the signified (concept.) Secondly, according to Peirce, an object is cognized through its image (the representamen), which is then interpreted (the interpretant). Interpretation is active, it leads to performance (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Edensor, 2000; Metro-Roland, 2009, 2011; Rickly-Boyd, et al., 2014; Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010). Interpretation draws heavily upon what Peirce refers to as collateral observation, the accumulated knowledge that we have built up over time. This interpretation or performance might be thoughtful, but more often it is an embodied habit. Consider the following examples:

Example 1: At the train station in Sheffield, England, a tourist walks towards the restroom but is stopped by a gate across the entrance. Not expecting an impediment, she steps back to look for instruction. As she does another woman approaches, inserts 20 pence into the coin slot, and walks through. She then imitates. A few weeks later, at a train station in Munich, Germany, she encounters a similar situation but reacts with little hesitation as she reaches for her coin purse upon seeing a turnstile at the restroom entrance.

Example 2: While touring the Royal Horticulture Society's Iris Garden, a man and his wife are discussing dinner plans. As they approach a rust-colored bloom, the woman asks the man if he was listening to her suggestion, as he seems distracted. He apologizes and explains that this flower was one of his mother's favorites and in seeing it he began to recall childhood memories of her in their garden. He then proceeds to narrate one particular moment.

Example 3: A group sets off on a hike in the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky, USA. As they approach the trailhead they see a poster that warns the Timber Rattlesnake is active this time of year, and explains to stay on trails and watch one's step. An hour into the hike they decide to take a rest on a rock outcropping. As they climb onto the rocks, they hear the distinct sound of a rattle just as one person jumps backward and slowly steps off the rocks. The others carefully follow and decide to take a rest further up-trail.

Using the basic semiotic foundation and the examples presented above, Peirce's notion of habit can be shown to account for performance and emotionality by drawing out two nuances of his semiotic system. First, as Peirce was a Realist, an object is any sensible thing or assemblage of things, this includes not only visible objects but also smells, sounds and nervous apprehensions or affects. Saussure's system is limited to language. Further, in the Peircean system, unlike Saussure's, signs may also be recursive as well as hierarchical. In the examples above, objects include a gate, another person, a garden, a flower, a poster, and a sound (rattle), among others. Each of these objects requires interpretation by way of performance, be that imitation, distraction and memory, or reflexive flight from danger.

Second, unlike Saussure's system, the interpretant in the Peircean system is ever-receding (Eco, 1976). That is to say, it is never totally settled or final, but rather continually dynamic. This must be so because any discussion of a final interpretant implies that collateral observation has reached some point beyond which it cannot become greater. Short of death, collateral observation always has the potential to increase. In other words, our continued experience of the world necessarily leads to further knowledge, informing the collateral observation by which we attempt interpretation. Peircean collateral observation is an individual's cache of tacit, doing-based knowledge and codified, written knowledge (Penrose, 1959). The examples above illustrate these different, but often relational, types of knowledge.

Codified or tacit knowledge is partly individual and as such is the by-product of identity production. The second example above, illustrates the individuality of knowledge, as only the man is overcome by the memory of *his* mother. His emotional response to the bloom, as an object, is the part of the performance of the interpretative process. Touring, at the level of the individual, has many associations beyond travel. Indeed, touring is all about associations. These associations flow into the Peircean semiotic system via collateral observation. Yet knowledge is also partly held in common, particularly as it is used to inform collective identities. It is these common-held knowledges that are in many ways the most complex because they are functions of the play between individual agency and societal structure (see Althusser, 2001; Giddens, 1984; Žižek, 1989). While example one illustrates the social aspects of interpretation, it also suggests ideology – that we come to know the signs of what is familiar and react with little thought when encountering them. When confronted with something unexpected, one turns to others for help in making sense of the situation. The third example, however, pushes beyond socialization to, arguably, biological habit. The individual who elicited the rattle from the snake came to an embodied interpretation accompanied by reflexive action. The others in the group, nearby but safe from danger, gave more thoughtful responses.

Our point in this research note is to simply return to a point first made by Peirce himself: that meaning is many things – a thought, a sensation, an emotion. Meaning is also a thing that puts us in motion; it is immediately and intimately performative. There is no meaning without action; no interpretant without

habit. The Peircean theory of signs thus nicely “bookends” tourism. It provides a framework from which to assess the ways as tourists we make sense of the sites we gaze upon and how those sites as signs inspire us to perform, individually and collectively, the ever-changing act of touring.

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